

# Better Homes and Centers



Michigan Department of  
Social Services

**Creativity**

Issue 28 Spring 1991

## WHOSE CREATIVITY FLOURISHES IN YOUR CLASSROOM?

*Patricia F. Hearron  
Licensing Consultant  
Saginaw County*

The creativity of young children can be one of the most exciting and rewarding aspects of working with them. Their inventiveness seems boundless, their joy in using it contagious. As teachers and caregivers of young children, we bear a special responsibility to treasure and nurture that precious quality of creativity. Frequently, however, that responsibility becomes eclipsed by what seem like more pressing needs. Creativity becomes confined to specific areas of the curriculum, like art and music. These areas are relegated to the status of frills in comparison to the "real meat and potatoes" of reading and writing readiness. Even worse, traditional modes of expressing creativity — like art and music — become instead vehicles for drilling "more important" subject matter.

Now there is nothing inherently wrong about using an art project to teach the concept of shapes or classification, or even the fine motor skills of cutting and pasting. In fact, all of these goals can be reached and a great deal of creativity exercised along the way. But I feel that there is something dishonest about producing 20 more or less identical little yellow ducks swimming under an equal number of cotton ball clouds and thinking that creativity has been fostered in the process. All the creativity — the playfulness — involved in a project like that has happened before the children get their hands on it. It was the teacher's creativity that was exercised when she found leftover cotton balls and yellow construction paper scraps in her supply closet and designed a project that would use them. Or, perhaps, it was creativity even further removed from the classroom, occurring in the mind of someone who put out a book of "100 handy craft projects for preschool children."

So what, you might say. The children learned some-

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## DIRECTOR'S CORNER

April is designated as the Month of the Young Child. This special month gives us an opportunity to reflect on the importance of child care in the lives of young, vulnerable children. As parents, we can be thankful that child care providers, whether they be family homes or child care centers, are willing to commit to caring for children and meeting their needs while parents are unavailable. As providers, we look forward to the challenge and opportunity to stimulate the mental and emotional development of young children with lifelong long results. As a state agency, the department is challenged to seek a balance between over regulation and assuring that children are protected in a risk-free environment.

The recent concern over the possible elimination of the Child Day Care Licensing Division resulted in thousands of letters from parents, advocates and providers to government officials. This shows how Michigan's citizens value quality day care and that they have no intention of taking a back seat to less progressive states. Michigan's child care community is to be commended for its aggressive assertion of what is and is not acceptable.

The Month of the Young Child can serve as a reminder of this and be used to celebrate this State's new commitment to being the best it can be in meeting the needs of its children.

Ted deWolf, Director  
Division of Child Day Care Licensing

"It has been said that if a child can be touched but once by the joy, the self-confidence and the wondrous sense of potential that comes with discovering the seed of creativity within, this child will be touched for life."

*Inner City Angels  
Toronto, Ontario Arts Group for Children*

## Whose creativity . . .

(Continued from page 1)

thing about following directions, about top and bottom of the page, about colors, about softness, smoothness, about how paste works . . . and they have something to take home to mom to go with the poem they learned about ducks. All of which are worthy goals for young children and none of which comes close to the heart of the matter of creativity which is SELF-EXPRESSION.

Creativity has been described as looking inward at the self, and outward at the world, and saying "I am." Expression of the self is a process that humans are involved in throughout a lifetime. The skill with which we do it influences our success in relationships, our works, our satisfaction with our lives. The media through which we can express ourselves are as varied as imagination allows. Language and scientific thought can be as creative as paints and clay if the words and ideas truly belong to the person producing them. Or they can be rote responses produced on command and having as little meaning as the 20 identical ducks.

Constance Kamii, who has written frequently about the application of Piaget's theories to the early childhood classroom, argues persuasively for the importance of creativity in learning. Of the three types of knowledge which Piaget postulates, only social knowledge can be directly transmitted through language or other teaching techniques. Social knowledge includes the names of objects, the rules for getting along in preschool, perhaps even the dictum that all ducks are yellow. The other two types of knowledge are physical and logico-mathematical. Physical knowledge, regarding gravity, weight, solidness of objects, how a body moves through space, must be discovered by the child in thousands of encounters with the environment. The last, logico-mathematical knowledge—which would include the certainty that the amount of liquid doesn't change if poured into another container—must be invented by the child. Thinking, figuring things out, is a creative act.

How many times as teachers do we not only fail to encourage this important type of creativity, but actually thwart it? How often do we emphasize the social knowledge that we can transmit at the expense of the other types of knowledge that children must ferret out for themselves?

I can think of one particular example in my own classroom several years ago. I happened to walk past the snack table where two or three children and one adult helper were conversing over peanut butter crackers. One boy, Elias, gestured excitedly for me to come see something. His eyes were sparkling with discovery but his mouth was full of crackers, so instead of telling me what he wanted to share he simply pointed at his napkin. It took a few more pointings before I understood that his napkin was spread out to make four square segments and that two of these contained a

cracker each. Elias was pointing at the two empty squares, however, and obviously delighted with their significance. I was fumbling for words to express what I thought he was trying to tell me about the way he could tell how many crackers he'd eaten when the adult at the table interrupted to ask Elias what shape the napkin was. At that point his eyes clouded over with what looked like disappointment or confusion and he let us know that the conversation was over.

Reading Kamii, and looking back at the incident, I am convinced that Elias had just created a logico-mathematical concept of equivalent sets or one to one correspondence. It was clear even then that he was tremendously excited about it. The question about the shape was in the realm of social knowledge, and it was just as clear that he was not interested in that at the moment. Needless to say, Elias will survive our awkward encounter. But the incident did make me wonder how many times similar things happened in my classroom.

How often when children gave what appeared to be a *wrong* answer to some question, did I take the time to talk to them and understand in what sense that was a *right* answer for them at that moment? How many activities in my classroom were open-ended so that enthusiastic children could go in any direction as far as they wanted: learning, discovering, creating?

Children give us so many opportunities to support their creativity. And it can be an exciting, creative act for a teacher to find ways to take advantage of these opportunities. Because this is a form of creativity for the teacher, no one can give a set of recipes. The secret lies in sensitive observation of children's behavior—watching them, listening to them, touching them—and letting them know you think their ideas and feelings are important. There are some basic suggestions, however, for the teacher/caregiver who values creativity and wishes to enhance it.

(1) Look around your classroom. How many open-ended materials are available to encourage children to express themselves in their own ways? Paints, clay, crayons, dress-up clothes and puppets seem obvious choices. How about sand, blocks, water, staplers, hole punches, mud, soap, seeds, hammers, nails, saws, scrap wood, natural objects, and typewriter? The list is endless.

(2) Look at the arrangement of these items. Is there a comfortable, clearly defined space in which to use them? Can a child concentrate on her block building without fear of it being destroyed by a tricycle? Are the collage materials sorted into trays so that children can see what choices are available?

(3) Look at your schedule. Do children have enough time on a painting to accomplish what they want without interruption? Can they spend extra time on a painting and be confident that there will be time to choose another activity, or do they have to rush from spot to spot because they aren't sure when you will call for clean-up? Are materials available long enough for

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# ART EXPERIENCES FOR THE PRESCHOOL CHILD

In an art experience, the goal is *not* the finished product or producing artists. The important thing is *what* happens to the child while he is creating. A mature artist is concerned with a finished product, but a child is concerned only with the process at the time. We should offer him many varied media and opportunities to grow in this vital way.

## I. Painting and Drawing Activities

### A. Tempera paint - dry powder or liquid

1. Brush and paper at easel or on floor
2. Feathers
3. Sponge - cut into shapes, e.g., hearts, pumpkins, etc.
4. Folded paper or "Blot"
5. Spatter - screening or atomizer
6. Straw painting
7. String painting
8. Dab or Print painting using spools, corks, etc.
9. "Blob" with eye droppers
10. Squeeze Bottle
11. Roll-on Bottles
12. Cotton ball or Q-Tips

### B. Variations of Tempera Painting

1. Shape painting - occasionally change shape of paper, e.g. pumpkin, circle, etc.
2. Texture Painting - change type of paper used, e.g. wall paper, newspaper, corrugated, sand paper, glazed, etc.

### C. Finger painting - commercial or homemade

One of the best media as no tools are needed. This a non-picture producing form, but a motor activity permitting wide use of imagination. Try it to music too.

1. May work together on oil cloth, freezer paper or plastic table top.
2. Work individually on shelf paper or large glossy paper.
3. May substitute liquid laundry starch and dry tempera paint sprinkled in.

### D. Water Color

1. Brush, paper, water, and paint.
2. Wet paper by dipping or sponging and drop blobs of color. Turn paper to have colors "run" and shade.

### E. Chalk, white and colored

1. Dry.
2. Wet - Chalk or paper dipped into water or buttermilk.
3. Texture - paper toweling, etc. Smearing done with kleenex or cotton.

## II. Modeling and Construction

- A. Clay - sense of touch developed and desire for constant change satisfied.
- B. Play doh - will form crust as it hardens. To reuse, keep in plastic bag in airtight container.
- C. Box and Wood Sculpture - all sizes and shapes glued together, adding various collage materials - paint if desired.
- D. Whipped Soap Flakes - use mixer to beat soap flakes and water. Can be molded when thick or "painted" with if thinner.



## III. Pasting and Cutting

- A. Tearing - lightweight paper works best, such as catalogs, newspapers, etc.
- B. Cutting - may be difficult, but child gains skill and coordination through practice and small muscle development. Remember to provide "lefty" scissors for the left-handed children.
- C. Collage - is a design of many types and fragments of materials pasted to a flat surface. The word "collage" comes from the French word "Coller" meaning to paste and stick.

### D. Variations of Pasting

1. White "School" paste
2. Elmer's Glue in squeeze bottles
3. Glitter pasting
4. Colored paste - add powdered tempera
5. Finger paint - thin paste with water and add powdered tempera or food color
6. Cover area with thin paste and "dust" with salt, sawdust, dry coffee grounds, etc. Especially nice collage background.

### E. Miscellaneous Experiences

1. Crayon relief - color over objects under paper, e.g. leaves, coins, etc.
2. Crayon resist - color and then watercolor over area.
3. String macaroni and Cheerio cereals on pipe cleaners or yarn with end dipped in Elmer's glue to form a "tip."
4. Pasting colored popcorn, rice, etc. on to small shapes to make jewelry, etc.
5. Large blunt needles for stringing and stitching freely into burlap or newspaper.
6. Magic Markers.

Almost anything can be used in a new way, an old way, or in conjunction with some other medium. The only limit we should experience is our own imagination.



# MUSIC FOR THE "NON-MUSICAL"

Carolyn Gaus  
Music Educator and Preschool Teacher  
Saginaw County

Have you ever wished that you could hire a specialist to come in and provide music education with your preschoolers? Have you felt frustrated about where to begin or how to go about making music with little people? Are you embarrassed to sing anywhere but in the shower? If these questions plague you, then read on. There is hope and a plan!

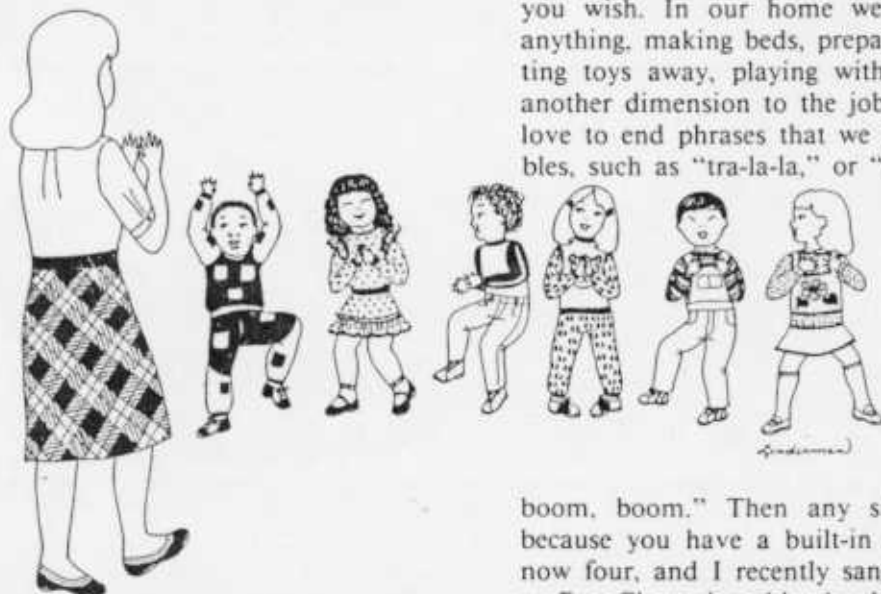
Why would a busy child care provider want to undertake something else, like music, to plan and organize? After all music is all around us; we hear it everywhere, on TV, the radio, when we are on hold on the phone, in the supermarket, at the mall, at church, at sporting events — everywhere! I suggest to you that including music into your educational program for children can easily become a way of thinking and doing routine tasks. Music can turn the mundane into magic and a difficult job into a pleasant pastime — for you and the children under your care.

A simple way to begin is by "keeping the beat." You can do this anywhere. Perhaps you and the children

music. As you begin keeping a beat in more and more situations with your little people, you will find them becoming very skilled at discovering steady beats in music around them. This is an essential prerequisite for learning to play an instrument, singing or dancing.

We have all heard children teasing or picking on each other, especially when playing outside. Sooner or later one hears a variation of "Na-na-na-na, you can't do it," sung in the sing-song of childhood. This little tune is actually a great stepping off point for melody development with children. When I hear children singing this tune (with their own appropriate or inappropriate words) I like to answer back with the same tune. I try to match their pitch, that is sing it back as they have sung it, not higher or lower. They usually do not realize that I have sung to them and sing right back to me. We can get quite a conversation going and we are singing the whole time. This helps make singing "safe." I can give commands; "I want you to stop that," praise, "You did that very well," give instructions, "Please come in for lunch." All of this is done in the same sing-song tune.

As you feel comfortable with this little tune, expand and make up more melodies to sing to whatever words you wish. In our home we sing while doing most anything, making beds, preparing lunch, cleaning, putting toys away, playing with toys. The singing adds another dimension to the job and smiles abound. We love to end phrases that we sing with nonsense syllables, such as "tra-la-la," or "wobblyboop," or "boom,



are watching a video. Music is heard. Without saying a word, begin tapping your hands on your knees to the beat of the music. Don't think about what the beat is or if you are doing it right, just tap to the music. Keep it steady and consistent. The children are bound to join in. As they do, change where you put the beat, try tapping your hand on your shoulders, toes, head, elbows, etc. It soon becomes a fun game. If you notice one of the flock not joining in or providing his own beat, you can gently bring him into the group by softly tapping the beat on his shoulders. This gentle tapping actually helps him internalize the beat and "feel" the

boom, boom." Then any size word or phrase fits because you have a built-in ending. My son, who is now four, and I recently sang our way from Saginaw to Bay City using this simple technique. Each time I stopped singing, he would say, "Sing more, Mom. Don't stop." And he joined in on all the repetition.

Where is the value in all this nonsense you say? As the preschooler and I enjoy this activity we are in fact practicing pre-reading skills and math-building skills. We are rhyming words, making up our own stories and dialogues, discovering patterns and adjusting to existing patterns. The children are internalizing their verbal creations but not only with words, also with music and perhaps even some movement, because it is hard to hold still when one is creating fun using rhythms in speech or music. And — you do not have

to be a music specialist to make up these little jingles. It does not even require the ability to sing well or always on pitch. All you need is the courage to go out on a limb and try what might seem silly.

Have you ever notice how much easier it is to memorize something that is sung? Think back to commercials you have heard. You can probably repeat many perfectly, if asked. Repetition certainly plays a role, but so do the music and the beat. The musical line helps our brain sort and file the information in an easy and logical way. The intended message is expressed not only with words, but also with a tune and a beat to help us. Why do advertising agencies use music so much? Why not just tell us the information? You can answer this yourself by thinking which commercials you can recall long after they have left the air. You can put this same principle to work when you teach young children. My three children all learned their telephone number and address early in their lives by means of simple sing-song melodies. Music is an excellent way to help our children memorize important things.

Another fun musical activity is to orchestrate a favorite book with children. Sequence books work very well for this. Choose a variety of "instruments" for your orchestra. I always start in the kitchen with pots, lids, spoons, graters, wooden spoons, plastic tubs (filled with beans, rice or cereal), bowls or buckets. You can always use "real" instruments (drums, maracas, claves, xylophones) if you have them, and both types work equally as well. Now assign an instrument to each main character in the book you've selected. For instance, if you have chosen the book about the *Three Billy Goats Gruff*, each goat would have his own sound as would the troll. There might be a sound given for grazing or splashing. The orchestral piece can grow each time you perform it as more ideas emerge from you and the children. Then you read or tell the story and at the appropriate times the proper instruments play. After a few times through the process you can "tell" the story using only the sounds of the instruments with no words at all. When the children can do this, they have internalized the story. It has become a part of them. And they have memorized the story, altered the presentation, and created a new way of telling it. Excellent skills for their development as thinking and problem solving human beings!

We can also turn the above activity around and make a book to go along with a musical piece. If you are in a small group situation, you may choose to make a "normal" size book using any type of paper you have available. If you work with many children in a child care center or preschool, I encourage you to make a giant book using poster board or a similar paper. (Even children in a small home care situation love to make giant books.) Once you decide on the materials it is time to select the music. We are looking for music without words and a selection that is not too long, five, ten minutes at the most. Something familiar

to you that you enjoy listening to will work nicely.

Now have the children listen to the music a few times. You probably will not want to do this all at once but various times throughout the day or week. Then come together and begin talking about the music. Does it make you sleepy or do you feel like waking up when you hear it? Does the music make your feet want to dance or walk slowly? Is it fast or slow, jumpy or smooth, high or low? Ask many questions and together you will see patterns forming. For instance, if your group decides that the beginning of the piece is jumpy, you may want to find or draw pictures of animals jumping for the first page of your book. As the music changes to calm and smooth, put together a page of pictures depicting peacefulness — quiet lakes, woods or empty streets. Your book need not be long. When it is completed, listen to the music again, this time holding the book as you listen. You have added another dimension and have helped your young people develop a love of listening and interpreting music. They may want to move with the music and their book will give them all sorts of suggestions.

Moving to music is something children do whether we ask them to or not. We can, however, enhance their creativity with the use of scarves, objects to move around and suggestions of how to move (galloping, jogging, crawling, slithering, big steps, mini-steps, turning, swaying, bending etc.) There are many recordings available which encourage this and many of these are good and fun to use. Do not limit yourself to "movement" tapes. Try to avoid the top pop chart also. The children will hear plenty of this music elsewhere. I encourage you to find classical or jazz music that you like to share with your little ones. You can be the one to open new doors of appreciation for them and expand their love of music. An important key is to begin with music familiar to you and then branch out from there. There is not right or wrong here so have fun and experiment!

One caution about listening: please do not have the radio or tapes playing constantly. Creative minds (even young ones) need silence to invent and ponder. Be deliberate about the times you listen.

One caution about singing: do not be alarmed if your two-, three-, or four-year-olds seldom or never join in the singing. This once concerned me and I wondered what I was doing wrong since I obviously was not reaching them. Then my own daughter was in one of my classes and she, too, rarely participated. Feeling very defeated I searched for what I was doing wrong and how I could correct this problem. Before too long I overheard her at home one day singing every song we had used in class. She knew them all! Allow your preschoolers the time and space to sing when they are comfortable doing so.

Music is a gift to all of us, not just those who study an instrument or take special classes. With a bit of creative thought you can add musical spice to your own child care program and a lifelong love of music to the children you touch.

# TAKING CARE OF KIDS WHO CAN TAKE CARE OF THEMSELVES

*Marlene Michels, Owner-Director  
Muppets, Magic and Moonbeans  
Isabella County*

I first met Tim last fall when his parents enrolled in our latchkey program. He was a healthy, active ten-year-old who had previously convinced his parents that he could take care of himself in those before-and after-school hours when his parents were at work. However, his need for adult supervision became apparent when he began to skip school and to disregard other aspects of the agreement he had made with his parents.

Needless to say, Tim came to our center feeling resentful and humiliated. Like other school-aged children, he viewed day care as being for "babies and little kids." He was convinced he would be bored to tears, have nothing to do and miss out on all the fun things his friends who were able to go home after school got to do.

Talking with neighborhood seven-to-twelve year olds confirmed that Tim's perceptions and fears reflect this age group's attitudes toward day care. I think it's important to recognize and respect these feelings so that we providers may better understand and address the needs and interests of this age group and accordingly design appropriate and enriching latchkey programs and activities for them.

After discussing program options with our school-aged children, our center designed an after-school program that emphasizes creativity and active "doing" and incorporates the interests, needs, and abilities of this special age group.

All children love making and doing arts and crafts, but this age group strongly dislikes cut-and-paste dittoed art projects. With the assistance of books like *Children and Their Art*, non-art educators can design art projects that are exciting, educational, and rewarding. A kitchen blender and a few other household items enable children to make the paper they later draw or paint upon (and to better understand the recycling process). Children love to visit area art galleries and studios where they can meet "real" artists fact-to-face and converse with them. If your facility isn't located in a larger city or near a college or university, invite local artists and artisans to visit your facility to demonstrate and share their talents with the children.

Older children also enjoy music, dance, and

drama or dressing up. Again, invite area high school or amateur musicians, dancers, and actors to your home or center. Ask the pom-pom team or cheerleaders to teach the children a simple routine or to help them make up their own cheer for your facility. Local teens could teach your pre-adolescents popular dance steps and help them prepare for future school dances. Help the children make their own musical instruments like box banjos and tubing horns, then form your own band. Schedule mock rock or talent shows so each child can enjoy the spotlight. Stage plays based on familiar folk or fairy tales for the younger children. Or have the children write and produce their own puppet shows for which they make the puppets, sets, and props. The children could also produce their own "Just for Kids" TV or radio news programs (great way to reinforce newly learned current events or geography lessons).

Unfortunately not many elementary school children receive second-language instruction, but you can make up for this deficit by incorporating American Sign Language into your latchkey program. The children not only learn another language, they also become sensitized to the beauty of an alternative, non-oral form of communication, and to the heritage and culture of the deaf community. Gallaudet College's bookstore can provide you with its catalog that offers everything from pictionaries to flashcards and song books. Children easily learn how to sing in Sign and enjoy the opportunity to be teachers to their peers, siblings, and parents. Matching games utilizing pictures of signs and their English spellings can be easily and inexpensively made. Play a silent bingo game in which the children match your finger-spelled letter with the printed one on their cards. Or, use real foods when learning their signed equivalents.

Speaking of food, children especially enjoy cooking and baking activities. There is a wealth of recipe books designed for young cooks, and many recipes allow for creative self-expression. For example, Vicki Lansky's *Halloween Jack O'Lantern Frosties* and *New Junior Cook Book's* Personalized Peanut Butter Cookies let the children make their own unique versions of a basic recipe. Try making foods from other countries and cultures. Besides providing tasty fun and the opportunity to eat your art work, these activities allow the chil-





dren the chance to learn the proper use of kitchen tools and to exercise their math/measurement skills.

To the Sports & Games component of your program, add visits to area recreational facilities, bowling alleys or skating rinks, and ask area high school athletes or some of your dads to share their athletic talents with the children. During outdoor exercise, take a neighborhood nature hike and collect materials for nature crafts or black walnuts from which you can make natural dyes.

These are just a few of the many things we providers can do to enhance the school-aged child's day care experience. Armed with an awareness of their physical, intellectual, and social-emotional needs, interests, and abilities and an appreciation for their natural curiosity, we can offer diverse, hands-on activities that promote creative self-expression and are challenging yet enjoyable and instructive.

Tim now enjoys coming to day care. His parents tell me he even looks forward to it.

## Whose creativity . . .

(Continued from page 3)

children to exhaust their possibilities, but not so long that they become boring or simply unnoticed permanent fixtures? How often do children have to hurry up and wait?

(4) Look at your program. Is a disproportionate emphasis placed on social knowledge? Do the children spend large blocks of time listening to you tell them the names of things, reciting nursery rhymes, counting by rote — with only scraps of time left over for the self directed, hands-on activities which are essential to the discovery of physical knowledge and the invention of logico-mathematical knowledge?

(5) Look at your lesson plans. Do "art" projects always have a pre-determined product or do you frequently give children the opportunity to simply explore with various media? Are old magazines, paste, scissors, crayons, markers and paper available on a daily basis so that children can design their own projects if yours doesn't appeal to them? Can they ask for and get staplers, tape, and other special tools when they need them to complete a spur-of-the-moment project?

(6) Look at yourself. Are you flexible and sensitive enough to hear what the children are telling you? Do you notice and compliment or imitate some of the wonderful movements or songs or poetic phrases that they invent? Or does everyone in your classroom always march to your rhythms and sing *your* songs? Do you ever hear yourself telling children to stop

talking so that they can do the "language" activity you have planned? To sit still so that they can do creative movement or rhythm exercises? Do you ask questions that really amount to "guess what I'm thinking" and therefore miss the wonderful logic by which they arrive at their answers?

Whatever your answers to these questions, I hope you will begin to see new ways to nurture the creativity of the children in your care.

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Please send articles for consideration in future issues to:

Better Homes and Centers  
Div. of Child Day Care Licensing  
Ingham County Dept. of Social Services  
5303 S. Cedar St.  
Lansing, Michigan 48911

### EDITORIAL STAFF

Tina Marks . . . . .	Home Licensing Consultant
Sue Young . . . . .	Home Licensing Consultant
Sandra Settergren . . . . .	Home Licensing Consultant
Carole Grates . . . . .	Center Licensing Consultant
Patricia Hearron . . . . .	Center Licensing Consultant
Judy Levine . . . . .	Licensing Supervisor
Sheila Linderman . . . . .	Illustrator

# BRINGING THE INSIDE OUTSIDE

M. Kathryn Spitzley  
Group Day Care Provider  
Ottawa County

Spring is here. I am anxious to be outside. My son has pulled the seals from our windows and my physical being gravitates toward the clean fresh smells, the breezes that ripple my hair and sunshine that penetrates my being. I believe that children and their caregivers need to be outdoors everyday. It is not easy to juggle multi-aged care, home maintenance, food preparation and be outside. In the past eleven years of providing child care, I have found some strategies that work. I hope that sharing some of my experiences with you will give you some ideas for spending time outside.

Why should we be outside when we could be inside? First, physically, children can move more freely with less restrictions outside. They can run, jump, climb, scream, holler and do all the things they might not be able to do inside. Second, vision is less restricted outdoors. Inside, I can see as far as the next wall. Outside, I may glimpse a car moving down the street two blocks away. Outdoors, children can tune into themselves and what is happening in the world around them. Finally, according to Joe Frost in his book, *Children's Play and Playground* "The playground is an extension of the indoor learning environment, a living laboratory of learning, doing, developing, not just perceptual-motor refinement but for the full inter-related array of skills."

Since spring mornings in Michigan can still be cool and damp, I plan to go outside with the children in the late morning. At first, I know children will need time to just explore on their own using tricycles, throwing balls, tossing frisbees, playing in a sand box, or just poking at the dirt with a stick! I could find a shaded place for an infant, or enjoy toddlers just discovering a squirrel in a tree, a bird or an airplane in the sky. After a while, the children need some other choices of things to do.

**SAND BOX:** Add water, using clean gallon milk jugs; add strong margarine containers and old spoons, or add cars that can take sand; clean and bleach chicken bones to hide and dig for; find household containers to make cakes for a "bakery."

**CHALK:** Draw with children on the sidewalk or cement.

**WATER:** Provide dishpans full of water, measuring cups, strainers, things that sink or float, boats, and even toys to wash. (Outside, wet clothes dry quickly).

**STREAMERS, SCARVES, RIBBONS, CREPE PAPER** and any other things that can be chased by the wind.

**PAPER, CRAYONS:** Make rubbings on the many interesting surfaces in your outside environment. Compare them.

**PAINT:** Take an easel outside. I prefer to use the

side of the garage with masking tape. The paints are in tall cups, each with its own brush. Each brush stays in its container. Children choose a color, then switch. Wet masterpieces are hung on a clothesline. Even if paint is spilled, we clean up with a hose so its not a big deal.

**BUBBLES:** Sometimes messy inside, great fun outside. Make your own solution.

¼ Cup liquid detergent (Dawn's good)

½ Cup water

1 tsp. sugar

few drops glycerin (buy at pharmacy)

Pour each child's in a 3 ounce plastic cup. You can make your own blowers by twisting a piece of light-weight galvanized wire, make sure sharp ends are covered.

I have discovered that all the things we do inside, we can do outside. By June we are outside for the greater part of the day. Children need quiet concentrating activities as well as socially stimulating large muscle play. As soon as all children have arrived, I let them know what choices are available and have a good idea of who will be doing which activities outside. Typical choices include the following:

**ART CUPBOARD** which stays out all summer. It contains paper, crayons, paints, stamps art, glue, staplers, tape, markers, scissors, pencils and a variety of materials to put together. There is a child-sized picnic table where children can use things from the art cupboard. (Before setting up the cupboard, I put selected items in a carry-all container and placed it on the table for children to use. Having the cupboard makes one less thing I have to take back inside.)

**WOODWORKING:** A bench is stored in the garage and rolled out when direct adult supervision is available. Real tools are used. Having markers nearby adds more to do with wood creations.

**CONSTRUCTION AREA:** No tools are used here — just old milk crates, tires, barrels, planks and other loose parts children can put together.

**DRAMATIC PLAY:** A covered tub housed under the climber contains old backpacks equipped with a lean cuisine tray (sturdy) a tin can, a heavy plastic glass, a spoon, a hat or vest, and anything else that lends itself to backpacking. Each item is coded with a marker so children return them to the appropriate backpack. Weatherproof table and chairs stand by another cupboard containing dishes, pans, plastic eating utensils and anything else for "house" play. Adding a few empty food containers extends this play into a "store." School-aged children could make a menu and the play becomes a "restaurant." Add make-up and dress-up clothes and the beautiful people can parade



around the block! (Our neighbors love it!) Shaving cream can be used on your face or just your hands.

**MUSIC:** Near the garage (source of electrical power), I put a tape player on a crate, along with tapes and books. Children can pause from their more active play to listen to a story or sing along with a favorite song.

**MANIPULATIVES:** Some children and I select three or four games or toys that can be put on a blanket or old tablecloth. The items are limited to the blanket so they are not lost in the yard or buried in the sandbox.

There is another time of our day that I select things for the children to manipulate. I can use a child-sized picnic table or simply put an old vinyl tablecloth on the driveway. (A barrier prevents cars from coming in during child care hours). We can color, paste, glue, handle, sculpt or whatever. Sometimes we put a piece of paper the length of the driveway and paint it with every kind of brush I can find. We could take a nature walk, collecting things to sort, glue or just carry in our bags. I have even gathered real clay, kept it in water and helped children knead mold and dry it. In short, some things I could do outdoors, I would never try indoors!

All of my outside activities assume that an adult is

managing, supervising and interacting with the children. I cannot make cakes in the "bakery" or wear a bandana as a pirate on Captain Hook's ship if I am weeding in my garden. Of course the children could join me in gardening. I feel that children should help maintain the outdoor environment just as they do the indoor environment, but it has to be done according to their schedule. Here's a good example: Recently I needed to empty the sandbox into the construction area so we could refill the sandbox with new sand. The first time I suggested such an activity, the response was unenthusiastic. The children really needed to just dig in the sand. So we did. The next day I tried again. We shoveled and hauled sand for forty-five minutes. The social cooperation (two children carrying one box of sand) was magnificent!

Obviously, things to do outdoors are limited only by your creativity and the needs of the children you are providing care for. I hope that this Michigan year you will join us in spending some time outdoors everyday.

*Mrs. Spitzley is a member of the 4C Quality Child Care System. Her group home has been accredited by the National Association for Family Day Care.*



# THE EARTH IS FOREVER: TEACHING CHILDREN TO TAKE CARE OF HER

Gwen Shaffer  
Outreach Assistant  
Ecology Center of Ann Arbor

The earlier environmental education begins, the more effective and influential it will be in the child's life. There are two main approaches child care workers can take in teaching children about recycling, conservation, and preserving their environment.

First, serving as role models by being environmentally conscious is very important. For example, the staff could keep their own cups at work, rather than drink from styrofoam or paper. Caregivers could also stress the importance of conserving energy by always turning off the lights and water when they are not being used. Another idea is to encourage children to bring their lunches in reusable lunch boxes, instead of brown paper bags.

Second, group projects promoting environmentalism can involve all the children. Setting recycling bins in the child care facility for depositing used paper, glass, and cans is a good way to impress the idea of recycling to the children.

There are lots of fun activities and games that also serve to make children more aware and appreciative of their environment. For example, children can be instructed to bring in clean, empty food containers and other used household items. Caregivers could then use them for creative art projects, such as making a drum from a coffee can or decorating old milk cartons and using them as planters. This way, children see that

"trash" can be valuable, if they exercise a little imagination.

There are endless activities for children to engage in that encourage environmental awareness. Simply by playing outdoors on a regular basis, they can learn an appreciation of nature. One activity could be bird-watching. Caregivers could teach the children different ways of attracting birds, such as bird-calling. They could even build a feeder and learn to identify the different species which visit it. Bug boxes, which allow children to examine different insects and learn about them, are also fun. Scavenger hunts are another way for children to explore nature.

One easy and exciting project that can be done either inside or outside is teaching children how to plant a garden or seeds. Things like tomato or sweet potato plants are most likely to grow. One thing to keep in mind, however, is that the room or plot must receive plenty of light and water.

Having a library of books covering topics like nature and pollution, such as *The Lorax*, is a good way to expose children to environmental ideals. Another thing to consider are the toys used at the center. Are they environmentally sound? Staff members should look at how they are produced, what materials they are made of, their longevity, and what they teach.

So, it is evident that child care facilities can play a large role in serving as role models for environmentally-conscious behavior and providing enjoyable activities that will educate the children.

## NATURE SCAVANGER HUNT

Jonalyn Rustem, Licensing Consultant  
Saginaw County

For older children, make a list of items to find outside. For children who can't read, you could use pictures. Have children work in teams. When everything is collected, each team could label and display their collection for everyone to admire. Here are some ideas to get you started.

- two rocks that look alike
- something yellow, green or blue
- something round
- something you can smell
- something ugly
- something beautiful
- something that is living
- something that is dead
- a leaf as big as your hand
- a rock as big as your fist
- a stick as long as your foot



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## APRIL IS ... THE MONTH OF THE YOUNG CHILD

Each April, the people of the State of Michigan celebrate the Month of the Young Child by holding public information activities around the state.

Sponsored by a coalition of public and private agencies and organizations, the Month of the Young Child draws attention to the needs of children. Communities are helped to recognize the importance of children and their families through a variety of activities.

The Month of the Young Child is celebrated by Social Agencies, Government Officials, Community Organizations, Businesses, Media, Child Care Services and of course, the Children of Michigan and their families.

April is also the Month of the Young Child Ribbon Campaign. As parents, child care providers or a member of the community at large, show your commitment to Michigan's young children by displaying a purple ribbon:

- on your car
- at your job
- on you
- on your child

Make a visual statement! Let your community know that the young children of this state and their families are important. Support efforts to improve the quality of their lives.

Purple ribbons can be obtain through MiAEYC or from your local store. Cut it into lengths and pass them out! Be a part of a successful campaign!

The Month of the Young Child Steering Committee has designated the following themes for each week of this important month:

Week 1 - Community and Corporate support for child care.

Week 2 - Child Care/Child Development.

Week 3 - Parents and families.

Week 4 - Child Health, Mental and Physical.

Look for activities in your community and help us celebrate the Month of the Young Child!





## PROVIDER'S CORNER



## FAMILY IS THE BEST FUN A Community Opinion

*Stanley Roth, Supervisor  
Grand Rapids Division of  
Child Day Care Licensing*

One summer evening, after a long day at the annual family reunion, I was putting my 8-year-old son to sleep. From his make-shift bed on the floor at his uncle's house, hundreds of miles from home, he looked up at me with a tired smile and said, "Dad, family is the best fun in life."

The words touched by heart. My young son had reminded me of the richness of what goes on "inside" families.

Family *is* the best fun in life. Yet, in our busy "hurry-up world," we can become preoccupied with it's problems than it's joys. We see family-life counselors are bombarded by family problems, marital disputes, divorce, custody fights and day care problems. Few

families are spared trouble, even tragedy. The family does take quite a beating. If we focus on this downside, we can easily lose our perspective and miss the elements of joy in everyday family life.

But what about the rest of the story?

Can we search out ways to celebrate family, to highlight its joys, to overlook its deficiencies, to advertise its strengths? Can we relearn the enjoyment of just being together, feeling fortunate to share the human experience with those we are closest to?

Life is too short to dwell on the difficulties present in modern family life. Each one of us can discover more ways to celebrate, to enjoy our families. When all is said and done, family is what we've got. It helps define both our limits and our possibilities.

Something as essential as family deserves our time. Regularly schedule family playtime on the calendar. Don't wait for "when we get a free day, we oughta..." Sharing leisure time with family can be richly rewarding.

Family play doesn't need to cost a lot of money. Picnics, potlucks, horseshoes, pick-up ball games, walks, and hikes, are all fun! Hold family "talks" or "pow-wows" highlighting the good things that are happening in the family, not just the problems. Get in the habit of regularly sharing your real-life humorous stories.

Commit to making family as important as work. Our occupations are important, but they needn't always come first, needn't always take priority over family time.

A strong sense of family takes time to nurture and develop. It can't be done "on the run." Take time. Create time to enjoy the best fun in life - FAMILY!

*Reprinted from the "Grand Rapids Parent" magazine, November 1990 with permission from the author.*

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300 S. Capitol Avenue  
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